Natural Resources Conservation Service

CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

WETLAND RESTORATION

CODE 657

(ac)

DEFINITION

The return of a wetland and its functions to a close approximation of its original condition as it existed prior to disturbance on a former or degraded wetland site.

PURPOSE

This practice is used to accomplish one or more of the following purposes:

- To restore conditions conducive to hydric soil maintenance.
- To restore wetland hydrology (dominant water source, hydroperiod, and hydrodynamics).
- To restore native hydrophytic vegetation (including the removal of undesired species, and/or seeding or planting of desired species).
- To restore original fish and wildlife habitats.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

This practice applies only to natural wetland sites with hydric soils which have been subject to the degradation of hydrology, vegetation, or soils.

This standard applies only to Class A (low hazard) structures with a fill height of 10 feet or less. Larger structures shall be designed using MN Practice Standard Pond (378), Grade Stabilization Structure (410), or TR-60 criteria.

This practice is applicable only where the natural hydrologic conditions can be approximated by actions such as modifying drainage, restoring stream/floodplain connectivity, removing diversions, dikes, and levees, and/or by using a natural or artificial water source to provide conditions similar to the original, natural conditions.

This practice does not apply to:

- The treatment of point and non-point sources of water pollution (Constructed Wetland - 656);
- The rehabilitation of a degraded wetland, the reestablishment of a former wetland, or the modification of an existing wetland, where specific wetland functions are augmented beyond the original natural conditions; possibly at the expense of other functions.(Wetland Enhancement - 659);
- The creation of a wetland on a site location which was historically non-wetland (Wetland Creation - 658).
- The management of fish and wildlife habitat on wetlands restored under this standard.

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes

The purpose, goals, and objectives of the restoration shall be clearly defined in the restoration plan, including soils, hydrology, vegetation, and fish and wildlife habitat criteria that are to be met and are appropriate for the site and the project objectives.

These planning steps shall be done with the use of a functional assessment-type procedure, or a state approved equivalent. The objectives will be determined by an analysis of current and historic site functions. They will be based on those functions which can reasonably be supported by current site constraints. Data from historic and recent aerial photography and/or other remotely sensed data, soil maps, topographic maps, stream gage data, intact reference wetlands, and historical records shall be gathered.

The soils, hydrology and vegetative conditions existing on the site, the adjacent landscape, and the contributing watershed shall be documented in the planning process.

The nutrient and pesticide tolerance of the plant and animal species likely to occur shall be evaluated where known nutrient and pesticide contamination exists. Sites suspected of containing hazardous material shall be tested to identify appropriate remedial measures. If remedial measures are not possible or practicable, the practice shall not be planned.

The availability of sufficient water rights should be reviewed prior to restoration.

Upon completion, the site shall meet soil, hydrology, vegetation and habitat conditions of the wetland that previously existed on the site to the extent practicable.

Where offsite hydrologic alterations or the presence of invasive species impact the site, the design shall compensate for these impacts to the extent practicable.

Invasive species, federal/state listed noxious plant species, and nuisance species (e.g., those whose presence or overpopulation jeopardize the practice) shall be controlled on the site as necessary to restore wetland functions. The establishment and/or use of non-native plant species shall be discouraged.

Criteria for Hydric Soil Restoration

Restoration sites will be located on soils that are hydric.

If the hydric soil is covered by fill, sediment, spoil, or other depositional material, the material covering the hydric soil shall be removed to the extent needed to restore the original soil functions.

Soil hydrodynamic and bio-geochemical properties such as permeability, porosity, pH, or soil organic carbon levels shall be restored to the extent needed to restore hydric soil functions.

Criteria for Hydrology Restoration

The hydroperiod, hydrodynamics, and dominant water source of the restored site shall approximate the conditions that existed before alteration. The restoration plan shall document the adequacy of available water sources based on groundwater investigation, stream gage data, water budgeting, or other appropriate means.

The work associated with the wetland shall not adversely affect adjacent properties or other water users unless agreed to by signed written letter, easement or permit.

Timing and level setting of water control structures, if needed, will be based on the actions needed to maintain a close approximation of the original, natural hydrologic conditions.

The original natural water supply should be used to reestablish the site's hydrology to approximate the hydrologic conditions of the wetland type. If this is not possible, an alternate natural or artificial water supply can be used; however, these sources shall not be diverted from other wetland resources.

If the alternate water source requires energy inputs, these shall be estimated and documented in the restoration plan.

To the extent technically feasible reestablish macrotopography and/or microtopography. Use reference sites within the local area to determine desired topographic relief. The location, size, and geometry of earthen structures, if needed, shall match that of the original macrotopographic features to the extent practicable.

Macrotopographic features, including ditch plugs installed in lieu of re-filling surface drainage ditches, shall meet the requirements of other practice standards to which they may apply due to purpose, size, water storage capacity, hazard class, or other parameters. If no other practice standard applies, they shall meet the requirements for Dike (356) unless there is no potential for damage to the feature or other areas on or off site due to erosion, breaching, or overtopping.

The Minnesota Supplement to Engineering Field Handbook Chapter 13 (EFH 13) contains tables that can be referenced for a quick and conservative design of this practice. Sites exceeding the criteria in these tables must be designed using flood routing.

Excavations from within the wetland shall remove sediment to approximate the original topography or establish a water level that will compensate for the sediment that remains.

Water control structures that may impede the movement of target aquatic species or species of concern shall meet the criteria in Aquatic Organism Passage (396).

Wetland restoration sites that exhibit soil oxidation and/or subsidence, resulting in a lower surface elevation compared to pre-disturbance, shall take into account the appropriate hydrologic regime needed to support the original wetland functions.

Criteria for Vegetative Restoration

Hydrophytic vegetation restoration shall be of species typical for the wetland type(s) being established and the varying hydrologic regimes and soil types within the wetland. Preference shall be given to native wetland plants with localized genetic material.

Where natural colonization of acceptable species can realistically be expected to occur within 5 years, sites may be left to revegetate naturally. If not, the appropriate species will be established by seeding or planting.

Adequate substrate material and site preparation necessary for proper establishment of the selected plant species shall be included in the plan.

Where planting and/or seeding is necessary, the minimum number of native species to be established shall be based on a reference wetland with the type of vegetative communities and species planned on the restoration site. Reference Section 5 of the Minnesota Wetland Restoration Guide for additional vegetative establishment recommendations; Main Page- Wetland Restoration Guide-BWSR:

- Where the dominant vegetation will be herbaceous community types, a subset of the original vegetative community shall be established within 5 years, or a suitable precursor to the original community will be established within 5 years that creates conditions suitable for the establishment of the native community. Species richness shall be addressed in the planning of herbaceous communities. Seeding rates shall be based upon the percentage of pure live seed and labeled with a current seed tag from a registered seed laboratory identifying the germination rate, purity analysis, and other seed statistics. Reference MN Agronomy Technical Note #31 for herbaceous

seeding specifications.

- Where the dominant vegetation will be forest or woodland community types, vegetation establishment will include a mix of woody species (trees and/or shrubs) adequate to establish the reference wetland community.
- Forested wetland establishment will include a minimum of three species, where appropriate. Seedling preparation and planting will follow the criteria of MN Practice Standard Tree/Shrub Establishment (612).

Criteria for Subsurface Drainage Alteration

In areas where subsurface drains are used to alter hydrology of the site, the existing drainage system shall be modified to the extent possible to restore the hydrologic conditions of the wetland. Such modifications are not subject to the requirements outlined in the Hydrology & Hydraulics section above, provided the restoration does not impact adjacent property owners, and no dikes, levees, or embankments are used to restore the wetland. Review of drainage records, interviews, and site investigations may be needed to determine the extent of the existing drainage system.

In some cases, existing subsurface drains may be blocked or controlled to restore wetland conditions to previously drained lands. Blocks and control structures shall be adequate to meet all hydraulic, structural, and other functional requirements.

Where the drain lines serve as outlets from other areas where drainage is still desired, appropriate measures shall be included in the design to keep the upstream drainage system(s) maintained at its current capacity.

The effects of the subsurface drainage system may be modified or eliminated by one or a combination of the following:

1. Removing or rendering inoperable a portion of the drain at the downstream edge of the site.
2. Modifying the drain with a water control device.
3. Outletting the drain above the wetland area.
4. Routing the drain around, away from, or through the wetland area.

When removing a portion of the drain downstream of the site, the length removed shall be sufficient so that the drain does not alter the hydrology of the wetland. Use lateral effect information to determine the break location.

The minimum length of drain that should be removed or rendered inoperable at each tile break is the shorter of what is necessary to make a tile have negligible impact on hydrology of the wetland within the lateral effect zone, or 100 feet (see EFH 13 MN Supplement). The measurement for tile broken is to begin outside the edge of the wetland. Sites with multiple tile breaks may use shorter distances as long as the overall impact is that the remaining tile is outside the lateral effect zone and thus has a minimal hydrologic impact on the wetland. A 100 foot break must be used at the outlet end for the overall site. The minimum for any break length is 40 feet.

Where dikes or embankments are to be constructed over existing drains, the entire length of the drain under the earth fill shall be removed. In addition, a minimum length of 25’ of tile shall be removed upstream from the upstream toe of the earth fill, and 50 feet shall be removed downstream of the downstream toe of the earth fill.

All envelope, filter material or flow enhancing material shall be removed within the length specified for tile removal. This includes tile fragments and debris. Where tile is removed, each exposed end of the remaining tile shall be plugged or capped to prevent water from entering or exiting the tile. The trench from tile removal shall be filled with similar soil and compacted to achieve the density equivalent to adjacent existing material. If the drain is routed around the wetland and perforated drain tubing or sectioned tile is used, the drain shall be located so that it has no hydrologic effect on the wetland area. This minimum

offset distance from the wetland should be determined by scope and effect equations; see EFH Chapter 19, Hydrology Tools for Wetland Determination. In general, routing non-perforated drainage tile through a wetland should be avoided. If it is necessary, the design shall consider flotation of the tile.

CONSIDERATIONS

Soil Considerations

Consider making changes to physical soil properties, including:

- Increasing or decreasing saturated hydraulic conductivity by mechanical compaction or tillage, as appropriate.
- Incorporating soil amendments.
- The effect of construction equipment on soil density, infiltration, and structure.

Consider changes in soil bio-geochemical properties, including:

- Increasing soil organic carbon by incorporating compost.
- Increasing or decreasing soil pH with lime, gypsum, or other compounds

Hydrology Considerations

Consider the general hydrologic effects of the restoration, including: Impacts on downstream stream hydrographs, volumes of surface runoff, and groundwater resources due to changes of water use and movement created by the restoration.

Consider the impacts of water level management, including:

- Increased predation due to concentrating aquatic organisms, including herptivores, in small pool areas during draw downs
- Increased predation of amphibians due to high water levels that can sustain predators.
- Decreased ability of aquatic organisms to move within the wetland and from the wetland area to adjacent habitats, including fish and amphibians as water levels are decreased.
- Increases in water temperature on-site, and in off-site receiving waters.
- Changes in the quantity and direction of movement of subsurface flows due to increases or decreases in water depth.
- The effect changes in hydrologic regime have on soil bio-geochemical properties, including: oxidation/reduction; maintenance of organic soils; and salinity increase or decrease on site and on adjacent areas.

Vegetation Considerations

Consider:

- The relative effects of planting density on fish and wildlife habitat versus production rates in woody plantings.
- The potential for vegetative buffers to increase function by trapping sediment, cycling nutrients, and removing pesticides.
- The selection of vegetation for the protection of structural measures that is appropriate for wetland function.
- The potential for invasive or noxious plant species to establish on bare soils after construction and before the planned plant community is established.
- The use of prescribed burning to restore wetland and adjacent upland plant communities.

Fish and Wildlife Habitat Considerations

Consider:

- The addition of coarse woody debris on sites to be restored to woody plant communities for an initial carbon source and fish and wildlife cover.
- The potential to restore habitat capable of supporting fish and wildlife with the ability to control disease vectors such as mosquitoes.
- The potential to establish fish and wildlife corridors to link the site to adjacent landscapes, streams, and water bodies and to increase the sites colonization by native flora.
- The need to provide barriers to passage for unwanted or predatory species.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Plans and specifications for this practice shall be prepared for each site. Plans and specifications shall be recorded using approved specifications sheets, job sheets, or other documentation. The plans and specifications for structural features will include, at a minimum, a plan view, quantities, and sufficient profiles and cross-sections to define the location, line, and grade for stakeout and checkout. Plans and specifications shall be reviewed and approved by staff with appropriate job approval authority.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

A separate Operation and Maintenance Plan will be prepared for sites that have structural features. The plan will include specific actions for the normal and repetitive operation of installed structural items, especially water control structures, if included in the project. The plan will also include the maintenance actions necessary to assure that constructed items are maintained for the life of the project. It will include the inspection schedule, a list of items to inspect, a checklist of potential damages to look for, recommended repairs, and procedures for documentation.

Management and monitoring activities needed to ensure the continued success of the wetland functions may be included in the above plan, or in a separate Management and Monitoring Plan. In addition to the monitoring schedule, this plan may include the following:

- The timing and methods for the use of fertilizers, pesticides, prescribed burning, or mechanical treatments.
- Circumstances when the use of biological control of undesirable plant species and pests (e.g. using predator or parasitic species) is appropriate, and the approved methods.
- Actions which specifically address any expected problems from invasive or noxious species.
- The circumstances which require the removal of accumulated sediment.
- Conditions which indicate the need to use haying or grazing as a management tool, including timing and methods.

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